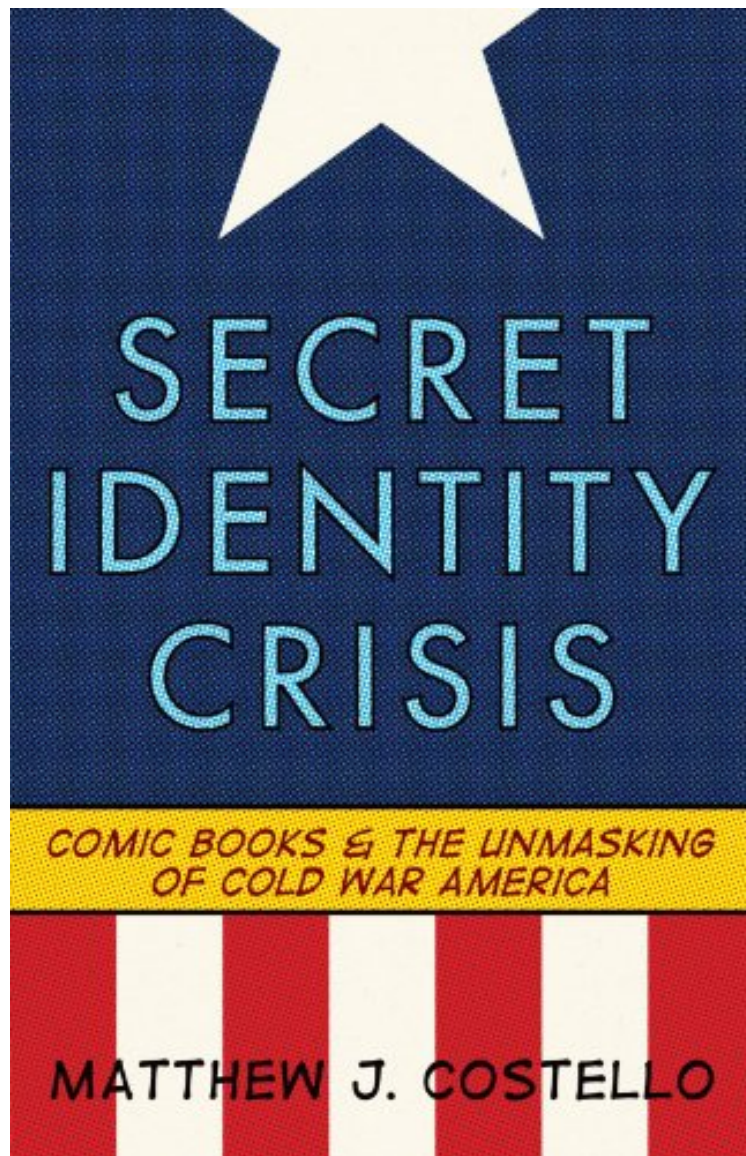


(Library ebook) Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America

# Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America

*Matthew J. Costello*

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**Matthew J. Costello : Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Four-Color Cold WarriorsBy SullyThis book isn't aimed at casual

comic-book readers -- Matthew Costello is a university poly-sci professor, and he's written his text for academics. That means he needs to establish the state of the scholarship before he launches into his thesis. Expect to slog through some left-leaning analysis of Cold War politics as a prelude to Costello's superhero breakdown. It's interesting stuff, even if you don't agree with the liberal slant. Then again, consider Costello's audience; he's writing for academics. For the most part, prevailing thought appears to rationalize reasons why America abandoned much of the big-government thinking that dominated the post-war era, assigning ideological imperatives to Cold War rhetoric while ignoring communism's human toll in places like China, Korea, Hungary, Cuba, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, Cambodia, Laos, Latin America, and Afghanistan, not to mention the gulags of the USSR. Costello takes pointed shots at Republican presidents like Reagan, vigorously defending Democratic presidents like Carter. You can imagine his faculty associates nodding in sage agreement. When it comes to comics, Costello delivers insightful, entertaining analysis. Anybody who read comic books during these years will instantly recognize the trends Costello isolates. Again, he assigns ideological motives to story and even graphical developments, largely ignoring the artistic maturation of the profession and its readership through the decades. Similarly, he fails to acknowledge the liberal influence that the industry's geographic base, New York City, and the creative professions' demographic makeup might exert on comic-book politics. In short, throughout a half-century the writers and illustrators grew as storytellers, and the audience just plain grew up. Artists also tend to natively embrace liberal ideals, contributing to a significant personal bias. Taken together, these factors could account for much of the thematic shift toward more introspective, realistic, political comic books during the Cold War. Market forces are another component, following the lead of other media like television or film; Costello mentions this, but only in passing. For Costello, acceptance of left-wing thinking is natural and correct, requiring little explanation, whereas conservative thought or disillusionment with big government is a misguided reaction attributable to fear and anxiety. These are minor shortcomings, and do not undermine what is a solid contribution to pop-culture scholarship. No, I don't agree with all of Costello's conclusions, yet I thoroughly enjoyed his analysis of the Cold War comic-book aesthetic. He knows his subject, and it shows. Recommended reading for superhero fans.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good conditions...By Customer I needed this book for my internal assessment in history and it actually contains a lot of info. The book is in good conditions

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. totally solid. By Justin T. Martin Do you like comic books? Are you an American Studies major? Do you have a term paper on the cold war and pop culture due in 2 weeks? If you answer yes to most these than this book is for you. Shazam.

What Cold War-era superheroes reveal about American society and foreign policy Physicist Bruce Banner, caught in the nuclear explosion of his experimental gamma bomb, is transformed into the rampaging green monster, the Hulk. High school student Peter Parker, bitten by an irradiated spider, gains its powers and becomes Spiderman. Reed Richards and his friends are caught in a belt of cosmic radiation while orbiting the Earth in a spacecraft and are transformed into the Fantastic Four. While Stan Lee suggests he clung to the hackneyed idea of radioactivity in creating Marvel's stable of superheroes because of his limited imagination, radiation and the bomb are nonetheless the big bang that spawned the Marvel universe. The Marvel superheroes that came to dominate the comic book industry for most of the last five decades were born under the mushroom cloud of potential nuclear war that was a cornerstone of the four-decade bipolar division of the world between the US and USSR. These stories were consciously set in this world and reflect the changing culture of cold War (and post-cold War) America. Like other forms of popular entertainment, comic books tend to be very receptive to cultural trends, reflect them, comment on them, and sometimes inaugurate them. Secret Identity Crisis follows the trajectory of the breakdown of the cold War consensus after 1960 through the lens of superhero comic books. Those developed by Marvel, because of their conscious setting in the contemporary world, and because of attempts to maintain a continuous story line across and within books, constitute a system of signs that reflect, comment upon, and interact with the American political economy. This groundbreaking new study focuses on a handful of titles and signs that specifically involve political economic codes, including Captain America, the Invincible Iron Man, Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD, the Incredible Hulk to reveal how the American self was transformed and/or reproduced during the late Cold War and after.

"Overall, the book makes an interesting case for the course of development in the character histories of [Captain America], Iron Man, and Nick Fury as being inseparable from the cultural climate of the late 20th century... He blends interpretations of larger trends in the character's development with canny close readings of individual issues that highlight his arguments. ...The chapters move smoothly and at a brisk clip, bringing to life the vibrant medium Costello is working with..." -Popmatters.com "Costello's impressively dense study makes some interesting points."